

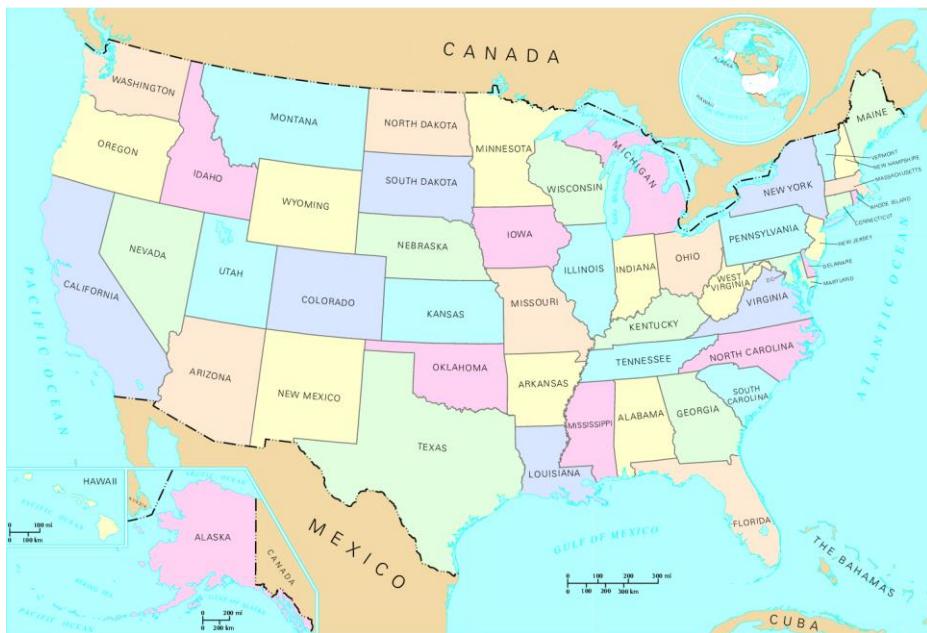
# USRAP Handbook

**Information about the United States Refugee Admissions Program  
for Priority 2 Designation in Malaysia**



Funded by the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM)

# What is the United States Refugee Admissions Program?



The purpose of this handbook is to provide a brief description of the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) and the processes involved. These steps are outlined in this booklet after refugee status recognition and referral by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) along with some of the most frequently asked questions by people interested in U.S. resettlement.

This booklet is intended for specific groups of refugees who have been identified by the U.S. Department of State as having access to the program by virtue of their circumstances and apparent need for resettlement. This group is referred to as a Priority 2 Grouping. Priority 2 includes specific groups (within certain nationalities, clans or ethnic groups, sometimes in specific locations).

The current Priority 2 Grouping designation for refugees in Malaysia is limited to refugees who belong to certain designated ethnic minority groups in Burma and who have been registered by UNHCR before or on 17 August 2010.

The United States remains the largest resettlement country in the world while also contributing to life-sustaining assistance programs that have an impact on millions of refugees, displaced persons, and victims of conflict. The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) offers refugees the chance to begin a new life legally in the United States. It is a **voluntary and free program**. America does not force anyone to resettle. You are the one who decides whether or not you want to apply for U.S. resettlement.

If you are unsure whether you are eligible for U.S. resettlement under the existing Priority 2 Grouping, please consult UNHCR.



**Processing for the U.S. resettlement is free of charge**

# Who are the Agencies involved in the USRAP process?



**United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee (UNHCR)**



**United States Department of Homeland Security (DHS)**



**Resettlement Support Center (RSC)**



**International Organization for Migration (IOM)**

## Resettlement Agencies



**The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)** in Malaysia is mandated to lead and co-ordinate international action to protect refugees and resolve refugee problems. Its primary purpose is to safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees. It strives to ensure that everyone can exercise the right to seek asylum and find safe refuge in Malaysia, with the option to return home voluntarily, integrate locally or to resettle in a third country. UNHCR conducts all activities related to the reception, registration, documentation and status determination of asylum-seekers and refugees.

In case of resettlement to the U.S., refugees need to go through the mentioned activities as the first step of the process before UNHCR.

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**The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS)** is the direct representative of the U.S. government. DHS schedules interviews based on the files they receive from RSC. Immigration officers conduct the final interview with refugees for determination on resettlement to the United States. The information from these interviews is then reviewed for security and other purposes before the adjudication can be made.

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**Resettlement Support Center (RSC)** (formerly known as Overseas Processing Entity-OPE) is an agency contracted by the U.S. government to help refugees through the resettlement process. RSC receives referrals from UNHCR and schedules refugees for an RSC interview, the first of the two interviews in the process. At the RSC interview, refugees will be asked questions about their personal history and family details. RSC does NOT decide who is able to resettle in the United States but only gathers complete information and documents of each refugee for DHS officers' use in their adjudication.

The RSC also schedules refugees to attend three to five days of Cultural Orientation (CO) training after their medical check so that refugees gain early understanding of what they will experience in the United States.

The RSC in Malaysia is a part of the International Rescue Committee (IRC) based in Bangkok.

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When DHS determines that a certain individual or family is eligible for resettlement to the United States, they inform the applicant by letter and give that information to the **International Organization for Migration (IOM)**, which helps arrange transportation and departure for resettling refugees from around the world. IOM is an International Organization and has two primary responsibilities in Malaysia;

1. Conducts medical exams and treatment as required by the U.S. and other countries; and
2. Arranges transportation to your new country, gets an exit permit from the host government, prepares your travel documents, helps you to get on the airplane, and meets you in transit and upon arrival in the U.S.

The IOM team in Malaysia is part of the IOM Regional Office in Bangkok, Thailand.

# Resettlement Agencies in the United States

Every refugee who resettles to the U.S. is assisted by a non-governmental resettlement agency. Resettlement agencies in the U.S. are there to help refugees with their transition into a new life and make sure that every refugee who is resettled in the U.S. is doing fine.

Resettlement agencies also provide guidance for refugees to become self-sufficient. This includes assistance in enrolling children in school, teaching about public transportation and safety and other necessary life skills, and working with adult refugees to find a job as soon as possible.

During the first 30 days after arrival in the United States, the resettlement agency will pay all basic living costs such as rent, electricity and provide basic housing supplies like bed sheets and dishes. They will also explain and help apply the types of programs and services that are available to refugees in the area where they are resettled. This will include things like English classes and health services and the types of ongoing financial support programs. The resettlement agency can help the refugee apply for these programs.

## 1. How much does it cost?

*All services provided by any of the agencies involved in the resettlement program are FREE OF CHARGE.*



## 2. Do I need to know someone in the U.S. in order to resettle?

*You do not need to know anyone in the U.S. or provide any person's name or contact number in order to resettle there.*

## 3. How long does the process take?

*The average waiting time from UNHCR referral to departure takes about 12 to 16 months. Processing timeframes may be longer due to the large number of refugees eligible for the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program. Every case is different and waiting times can vary.*

## 4. What support will we get after we resettle?

*America is a huge country, with fifty different states. Many things differ from state to state, like cost of living, geography, and governmental policies. The support you get in America will depend on where you end up living because every state is different.*

*The resettlement agency, upon your arrival in the U.S., will support you financially throughout your first 30 days. Your agency will help you with the basic things you need to start your new life: housing, food, free English classes, putting your children in public school (which is free!), but they won't be able to support you forever. That's why a major part of what they do is to help you find a job.*

*Once you get your own job, you will be on your way toward becoming self-sufficient. After the first 30 days, you will be responsible for paying your own expenses. Your resettlement agency can also explain and help you apply for ongoing financial support programs that you and your family may be eligible to receive to meet your basic living expenses.*

# Step 1: Resettlement Support Center (RSC) Interview



After refugee status recognition and referral by the UNHCR to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, the RSC will call you for an interview. The RSC interview is to prepare your case for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) by verifying and collecting information about your family and background.

One week prior to your interview, RSC will call you to let you know of your interview date and time. RSC can only call those who are referred by UNHCR for a pre-screen interview. RSC neither register refugees nor decide who can go.

It is important that you provide UNHCR and RSC your most updated mobile number. If you cannot make it for your interview, please call RSC 03 2141 5846

## What should I bring to my interview?

*Please bring the following to your interview:*

- UNHCR ID card
- Birth certificate(s) (if you have them)
- Marriage certificate(s) (if you have them)
- Hospital documents (if applicable)
- Death certificate(s) (if applicable)
- If you have family member(s) living in the U.S. and want to resettle near them, you should bring

*their name, address and telephone number. RSC will coordinate with the voluntary agency who will determine whether it would be possible for you to resettle near them. Remember, it is not necessary to have family members in the U.S. in order to be accepted in the resettlement program.*



**Remember:** All immediate family members living with you must be present at the RSC interview. After the interview, if there are changes in your family composition (marriage, death, birth) you should go to RSC (with any new documents) to update the information right away.

## Where will the interview take place?

The RSC interview will take place at 570 Jalan Bukit Petaling, UNHCR compound.

## Do I have to bring my entire family to the RSC interview?

*Yes! All immediate family members living in Malaysia must be at the RSC interview in person. If anyone in the family cannot be at the interview for any reason, please call RSC for consultation.*

## What if I don't know the answer to an interview question?

*It is important that you are truthful at your interviews throughout the process including RSC interview and that you do not make up any information that you are not sure of. If you do not know, simply tell your RSC interviewer that you do not know. If you do not understand the question, please ask for clarification. Please make sure that you have good communication with your interpreter.*

## What happens next?

*After your RSC interview, you will be notified by phone of the date and time of your DHS interview.*

## Step 2: Department of Homeland Security (DHS)



The U.S. Department of Homeland Security office will interview you to see if you meet the U.S. criteria for refugee status and are eligible to enter the U.S. as a refugee. **DHS (and only DHS) makes the decision as to whether or not you are allowed to go to the U.S.**



**Remember:** All immediate family members living with you must be present at the DHS interview.

### At your interview:

- Always tell the truth.
- If you are found to have lied to a U.S. DHS officer you may be ineligible for U.S. resettlement.
- Don't be nervous. Although interviewing with a U.S. DHS officer may seem scary, they are there to ask you about your history.
- If you do not understand the question, you may ask the interviewing officer to repeat the question or simply say you do not understand. Do not make up stories or fabricate your story.
- The interview will take approximately 1 to 2 hours. Every case is different and length of time for an interview may vary.

### Do I have to bring my entire family to the DHS interview?

Yes! All immediate family members living in Malaysia must be at the DHS interview in person. If anyone in the family cannot be at the interview for any reason, please call RSC for consultation.



### When will I know if I am accepted to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program?

Following your interview with DHS officers, RSC will call you to come to the RSC office for your DHS decision letter. For a case update, you can visit our inquiries website at any time. You may also send an e-mail or call our Inquiries hotline during regular office hours.

### What happens if I receive a DHS decision letter telling me I am ineligible?

If you are found ineligible by the DHS, you have 90 days to appeal by providing a written statement containing new information about why your case should be reconsidered. You will also be able to see UNHCR Resettlement staff for counseling.

## Step 3: International Organization for Migration (IOM)



Accepted individuals will be called for a medical check with IOM (*International Organization for Migration*). IOM also takes care of travel arrangements for you to the U.S.

At the same time, information about you and your family will be sent to your resettlement agency in the United States. Your resettlement agency will prepare basic assistance for you such as finding you a place to live, enrolling your children in school, helping you look for a job and assisting with your transition into your new life in the U.S.

After you complete your medical exams, you will return to your previous residence and wait for IOM to notify you of your departure date.



Please call the IOM office no. 03 2145 7214 if you miss your medical examination.

## Medical & Travel Departure

It is very important that you do not miss your departing flight. If you cannot leave on your departing date you must contact IOM immediately.

A representative of your resettlement agency will be at the airport in the United States to meet you when you arrive.



**I'm afraid to fly. Will we be able to go to the U.S. by boat?**

*No, refugees go by airplane to the U.S. Travel by plane is very safe. Your cultural orientation instructor will explain about how to live in America and about how to fly on the airplane.*



**My wife just had a baby and we are scheduled to depart in the next 3 weeks.  
What should we do?**

*If your wife just had a baby and you are scheduled to depart soon, please inform the IOM medical team as soon as possible. Newborn babies can travel within one or two months after they are born, as long as both the mother and baby are healthy. Of course, your baby must be registered with the UNHCR and you should do this as soon as the baby is born. You will be re-scheduled for a new travel date when the mother and baby are fit to travel.*

## **Step 4: Cultural Orientation (CO) Training with the Resettlement Support Center (RSC)**



After the medical check, you will be scheduled to attend three to five days of Cultural Orientation (CO) training with the RSC (Resettlement Support Center)

It is very important you attend the Cultural Orientation (CO) training every day. The CO trainings are given to help you prepare for your new lives so that you can develop realistic expectations about life in the United States.

The topics addressed in CO training include pre-departure processing; role of the Resettlement Agency; Housing; Employment; Transportation; Education; Health; Money Management; Rights and Responsibilities; Cultural Adjustment; and Travel to the U.S.



Please call the RSC CO office (03 9222 0041) if you miss your cultural orientation.

## Step 5: Resettlement Agencies



When you arrive in the U.S., someone from your resettlement agency will meet you at the airport to pick you up and take you to your new home. Every refugee who resettles to the United States is paired up with a non-governmental resettlement agency there. Resettlement agencies are there to help you with your transition into new life in the U.S. and make sure that every refugee who is resettled in the U.S. is doing fine.



Processing for the U.S. resettlement is free of charge.



### What will my status be when I arrive in the United States?

*When IOM takes you to the airport they will give you a big white IOM bag. That bag will contain all the documents you need to receive official refugee status upon entering the United States. When you get to the airport in the U.S., an airport official will check the documents in your bag and give you an official stamp of approval. That stamp means you have legal refugee status in the United States.*

- **Legal Refugee Status:** *With this status you are immediately granted the right to live freely and safely in America. If you want to travel outside of the United States you have to apply for a travel document. See your resettlement agency for help with this.*
- **Permanent Residence Card:** *After one year of living in the U.S., you can apply for a permanent resident status. This is the first step towards becoming a U.S. Citizen. If you want to travel outside of the United States you have to apply for a travel document. See your resettlement agency for help with this.*
- **U.S. Citizenship:** *After 5 years of continuously living in the United States, you can apply for U.S. citizenship, which grants you all the rights of any other American citizen. The requirements include basic knowledge about U.S. culture and history and proficiency in written and spoken English. Your resettlement agency can provide additional information about the citizenship application process.*



# Frequently Asked Questions

## QUESTIONS ABOUT THE USRAP PROCESS

### **1. I was recently arrested, detained and deported but now I am back in Malaysia. Who should I contact if I missed my RSC or DHS interview?**

*If you were arrested, detained and deported but have now returned to Malaysia, please contact UNHCR as well as RSC office to let us know your most up to date contact information so that we can arrange for new interview date.*

### **2. My phone was stolen. Who should I inform about my new phone number?**

*Please let RSC, UNHCR and IOM know immediately your new phone number so that we can contact you. You can call the UNHCR office or the RSC office.*

### **3. What if I get married after my RSC or DHS interview and my spouse is unregistered or registered after the cut-off date, who should I tell?**

*Please inform UNHCR and RSC about your spouse as soon as possible. Please be advised that getting married after your RSC or DHS interview will delay your resettlement process time. The eligibility of your claimed spouse will be thoroughly assessed by UNHCR and DHS.*

### **4. Can I resettle by myself as I don't have any family or relatives in the U.S.?**

*Yes, you can resettle alone. Resettlement is an individual choice. You do not need to have a family member or relatives in the U.S. in order to be considered for resettlement program.*

*It is absolutely not necessary to have any family members living in the U.S. There are thousands of refugees from around the world who have succeeded in the U.S. without initially knowing anyone there!*



### **5. Can my immediate family members who are still in Burma resettle with me? I'm still waiting for them to come to Malaysia.**

*Yes, you can wait for immediate family members to come to Malaysia or depart first and they can reunite with you in the U.S. if they are approved for resettlement, but please be mindful that this process will take at least one to two years to be processed.*

*All newly arrived family members will need to be registered and recognized by the UNHCR prior to being processed by the RSC for resettlement. It is important during your resignation with UNHCR that you declare your immediate family members and their location (Burma, Thailand, Malaysia, etc).*

### **6. I have family members in the U.S. Can I resettle near them?**

*During your RSC interview, you should tell RSC if you have family members living in the U.S. You should also bring their name, telephone number and address with you to the RSC interview. RSC will coordinate with the voluntary agency who will determine whether it would be possible for you to resettle near them.*

### **7. Can I move to another city after I arrive in the U.S.?**

*If you consider moving to another city or state, remember that your resettlement agency is not responsible for moving you and the resettlement agency in the area you move to is not required to help you. If you decide to move, you will be responsible for your own support.*

## **8. Our family has an adopted child. Will we be able to bring that child with us to the U.S.?**

*If your family has an adopted child, RSC advises that you contact UNHCR for consultation, because every family's circumstances vary from case to case. UNHCR will determine what is in the best interest of the child.*

## **QUESTIONS ABOUT STARTING A NEW LIFE IN AMERICA**

### **9. I have many small children. Will I be able to support myself and my children when I resettle in the U.S.?**

*Most Americans have an average two children per family but it is expensive raising a child in the U.S. The larger the family, the harder parents will have to work to provide for their children.*



*If your children are over the age of 5 they will be in public school during the day. Children ages 5-18 in the U.S. attend public school for free. If your children are younger than 5 years old, things will be more difficult, but you have several options. The first option for two-parent families is for one parent to work during the day and the other to work at night so that the children can be looked after at all times. The second option, and this is especially for single parents with young children, is to work something out with the other members of your neighborhood or community so that while some people work, some stay at home to take care of the children. The third option is pre-school or another kind of official child care, but that is very expensive.*

### **10. I can't read or write. I also don't know any English. Can I still find a job there? What kind of job will I get?**

*People with no or limited English can get jobs. Certainly, the more English you know the easier it is to find a job and the higher the salary. Most refugees start off in entry-level jobs in hotels, restaurants, grocery stores, or factories. As you improve your three 'E's: English, Education and work Experience, you can get better paying jobs, and work your way up the 'job ladder'. Resettlement organizations in the U.S. are well-connected to their communities and know which businesses tend to hire refugees. In most communities, refugees have a great reputation for being hard workers and diligent employees, and employers are eager to hire them. Your resettlement agency will help you through the entire process of finding a job.*

*The important thing is to get started working as soon as you can, so be prepared to TAKE ANY JOB as your first job. When you have several months, or a few years of working experience, you will be able to find jobs with higher pay and with the type of work that you would like to do.*



### **11. Will I be able to go to school if I'm over 18 years old?**

*Public education in the U.S. is free for children aged 5 to 18 and public school is mandatory for everyone between the ages of 5 and 16.*

*For those who do not yet have high school diplomas but cannot attend public school, they have the opportunity to get a high school equivalency diploma, or GED (General Equivalency Diploma or General Educational Development) by taking night classes that fit around their work schedule. The GED is made up of five tests in five different subjects: Reading and Writing in English; Social Studies; Science, Language Arts and Reading; and Mathematics. The cost of getting a GED depends on where you live.*

## **12. If I have serious or chronic diseases, will I get support from the government?**

*It depends on where you live. Different states have different policies when it comes to governmental support. In some cases, refugees are eligible for low-income health insurance, called Medicaid or Medicare. Health care in the United States is not free and can be very expensive. Plans like Medicaid and Medicare are there to help people who cannot afford health insurance on their own.*



## **13. Do my sons have to serve in the army?**

*No. Every man between the ages of 18 and 26 has to sign up for the 'selective service'. This does not mean that they are signing up to fight in the army. The selective service is a pool of healthy and able young men who can be called to duty in the case of a draft. The United States has not had a draft in over thirty years. If you want to join the army then you can, but it is your choice to do so and there are a few restrictions. First, you must be a legal permanent resident and hold on a green card, which means you must live in the U.S. at least one year before you are eligible. Second, you must be over 18 and be healthy enough to pass a medical check. Third, you have to have a certain level of English language proficiency.*

## **14. Do I have to pay back the cost of my resettlement?**

*The only thing that refugees are asked to pay back is the cost of their airplane tickets. Other services – the medical checks, cultural orientation training, and any help you may receive from the U.S. government once you arrive are FREE! Refugees are asked to begin paying back the cost of the airplane ticket 3-6 months after arrival in the U.S.; many people already have jobs by then. The government then gives you 3 years – 36 monthly payments – to pay off this interest-free loan. For the majority of refugees, this payment is not a great hardship, and is an important way to establish a good credit history as someone who pays their bills on time, so that later you will be able to borrow money from a bank for college or to buy a house.*

## Your Case Status

Please remember that each case is different and the DHS officers make their decisions on a case-by-case basis.

If you have questions regarding your case, you can visit our inquiries website any time. You may also send an e-mail or call our Inquiries hotline during regular office hours. Please keep in mind that due to high number of refugee inquiries, routine inquiries about case status and those cases processing within normal timeframes will not receive responses. If you are reporting a significant change in your status, RSC staff will respond to you within two weeks.

 **RSC** 03 2141 5846

 **IOM** 03 2145 7214

 **Case Status Inquires website:** Casi.rescue.org  
**E-mail:** KLInquiries@rescue.org

 **Resettlement Support Center**  
570 Jalan Bukit Petaling  
Kuala Lumpur, 50460  
MALAYSIA

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